

Details

What to Do Before Giving Kids Their First Phone with Dr. Catherine Pearlman - 177

In this episode, Dr. Catherine Pearlman, author of *First Phone: A Child's Guide to Digital Responsibility, Safety, and Etiquette*, joins to discuss what to do before giving kids their first phone. You'll also hear actionable tips for educators and families to consider, whether you work closely with families or help prepare students to navigate the digital world.

Link to live show notes: <https://classtechtips.com/2022/08/23/first-phone-177/>

Introduction

Hello there and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast! If we haven't met before, my name is Monica Burns. I'm a former NYC public school teacher and I've been out of the classroom for a few years leading professional development for teachers, and writing about all things EdTech on my blog [ClassTechTips.com](https://classtechtips.com)

A quick reminder — head to my website classtechtips.com/podcast for all of the show notes and resources from today's episode, and if you're listening to this episode on a podcast player like Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or Google Podcasts, you should see a link in the description that you can click on as you listen today with the show notes and all the resources mentioned in today's episode.

Promotion/Reminder

You can't put a price tag on a teacher's most valuable asset - time - which is why Tract is giving time back to teachers for FREE this back-to-school season. In partnership with student-favorite athletes, creators, and artists, Tract is kicking off the school year with a set of curriculum aligned Project Guides designed for students in grades 3 - 8. Each guide is chock-full of enriching educational content and on-demand challenges, posed as driving questions, designed to stir creativity and challenge students to solve real-world problems. View the project guides and join Tract FREE by visiting teach.tract.app and use access code MONICA at sign up.

Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled "What to Do Before Giving Kids Their First Phone" and I'm very excited to chat with Catherine Pearlman. She shares very actionable tips for educators and families to consider, things you can think about whether you work closely with families or help prepare students to navigate the digital world. This is a big topic and Dr. Pearlman gives you specific things to take into consideration, and reflect on this school year. Let's dive into the episode!

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast today. I am very excited to chat about this topic with you, but before we dive into the list of questions I have <laugh> to share would love for you to share a little bit about your role in education. What does your day to day look like?

Catherine Pearlman:

Sure. So for the last 10 years, I've been a full-time professor teaching social work for nontraditional students for the most part. And mostly for the last eight years I've been teaching online so long before everyone else went to Zoom. I've been on Zoom with my students. And it's been great, you know, giving access to these students who maybe would not otherwise be able to go to college. So that's what I've been doing. And day to day really varies. I always would try and do most of my greeting Monday, Tuesday during the week. And so students could prepare for the week and then making classes, making content during the rest of the week.

Monica Burns:

Nice. And so, you know, I know people listening in today come from a variety of roles and the space and just interested in technology, the way that students and kids of all ages are using technology. So when we first connected via email, I think, you know, I was really excited to hear more about your work and just unpacking what is, what can feel like a really big and intimidating topic, which is what we're talking about today of kids and phones. And it's a big topic. And before we look at some strategies and things for educators and families to consider would love to know, you know, what drew you to this topic?

Catherine Pearlman:

So I've been working with children and families for 25 years. So I tend to watch them do a lot of research. And what I've noticed is, you know, phones, cell phones, smart phones are ubiquitous. Now mm-hmm, <affirmative>, it's not like, you know even if you have an eight, nine year old who doesn't have a phone, their best friend does, or their older sibling does. And access is really happening at a very young age. The pandemic happened and, you know, kids who maybe had one or two hours of screen time were now having eight to 12 hours of screen time. And with that screen time came access to more social media, to more cyber bullying. A lot of things like that. And then the last thing that I noticed was, you know, even conscientious parents who are very involved with their kids are struggling to protect them from scams, from the effects of social media from sexting from porn you know, parents cannot

completely protect their kids. And so I kind of started thinking, we need to teach kids directly to make good decisions. Like we do a sex ed, we need to start young and early and continue on all of, you know, schooling for a lifelong process of digital education. So those are the kind of things that happened that brought me to this topic.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And just as you were talking there, you know, thinking about it being a lifelong piece, right, we're all learning about navigating spaces that are changing and evolving how to be safe and smart and online spaces, the digital citizenship connection. So, you know, as we jump into this idea of what happens next, when a student, a child, right, you mentioned even under 13 is given a phone or a tablet by their families, you know, before that, what do we do after we give it to them? I know there's things that can happen beforehand, right? Mm-Hmm <affirmative> so what should happen before that device even gets into their hands?

Catherine Pearlman:

So first parents should think about why does this kid need a phone? And there are some legitimate reasons for kids to have phones. There are some educational benefits. One of the kids in my book has diabetes and monitors it on a cell phone. Some kids are, have divorced parents or are alone at home before their parents come home from work. So there are some legitimate reasons, but I think it's important for the family to assess like, what is the need? Why are we doing this? And then assess your kids ability to disconnect from screen time. So if it's an incredible struggle to get your kid to turn off after an hour, when you say, okay, we have to be done by six, then we need to eat dinner and do like, you know, bath and whatever. And it's a struggle every single night.

Catherine Pearlman:

Well then you might wanna work on that first before getting the smartphone where, you know, it's gonna be a constant battle and to establish some rules and guidelines for how you manage that. I, I think that's really beneficial. And then the last thing is, you know, you don't have to wait until your kid gets a phone to start educating them about predators and scams and phishing. And what's that all about cyber bullying. These are, these are topics they've heard about, but they don't really know about. So I think beginning that education before, and just as they get the phone can be really beneficial.

Monica Burns:

I love what you said about the why or that intention, cuz it's something that, you know, as a classroom teacher, as an educator that hosts professional development for educators, and it's just talking about tech use all the time, my work more so in the curriculum side of things, right? And the integration within a classroom setting, you know, we're always having that

purpose conversation or why are we using a Chromebook or an iPad during this lesson? And can we really establish what the benefit is? What the value add is what couldn't happen without this device, which is why we're pulling it in. So some of the reasons that you shared, I think are, are really compelling ones to bring into our own conversations, to say, you know, there are legitimate reasons why a child of many ages, right, a wide age range might need to have a personal device like this given to them by a family member.

Monica Burns:

But even if we don't quite have that great, why just yet starting those conversations, thinking about what's happening around students and children just disconnecting from devices is such a great thing to consider, you know, for educators who might be giving advice to family members who might be watching things happening in their own home with their own children and family members. So really anchoring in on that, that intention and the why is, is so wonderful. And I appreciate that connection cause it's, it's something we talk about a lot here too. So, you know, even if a teacher isn't giving a student a phone, what strategies can they explore in a classroom where they might have some other devices that can help students with digital responsibility, safety and, and etiquette.

Catherine Pearlman:

So one thing that teachers can really help with is giving kids tools for shutting down for like, you know, how do we disconnect how for, especially when it's hard for some kids, classroom teachers are amazing at structure. And I think if they can sort of work that into the lesson about, okay, how do we disconnect from something that we're enjoying? How do we move on to the next part thing that we have to do when we get distracted? I think that's great for the classroom. And I think one other thing that I would love to see more of is teachers talking more about being able to look at the internet as something that we have to assess. We can't think everything is true. How do we see what's a credible source? You know, young kids are doing research on the internet for, you know all kinds of birds and you know, whatever it is.

Catherine Pearlman:

And you know, they have to be able to see like what's a credible source even in kindergarten. Like what are the, you know, and so I know some teachers are talking about this, but I think that as kids get older to develop more ways to ascertain like what's a credible source, what may be an opinion, which is also totally fine, but you have to understand that it's an opinion. So I think those are some great things, maybe some mindfulness about how our devices make us feel like I think teachers are great about integrating yoga and mindfulness. And maybe after we disconnect, we just take a, just a two seconds to just assess how are we feeling? How did we do any thoughts that came up, anything, any, you know, anything upsetting that anybody saw. And then to be able to process that because even though a lot of the school computers

are limited in what they've access to things definitely get through. I know for sure. And sometimes kids see something and they just go to the playground and talk about it, but it's great. If teachers can kind of bring it into the classroom, is there anything anybody saw that they'd like to discuss and and create an open environment where we share about these things and we don't feel shame and you know, we feel comfortable explaining it.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. Just the modeling component, right. Even in kindergarten to point out, you know, I got this picture from this website that gave me permission to share this picture with you. Right. Or I know this is a great source because it comes from a museum's website. Right. And those are things that you don't have to go deep into, but you're planting that seed to help kids make connections later on. So I love that kindergarten connection and yeah, just providing that space for conversation and reflection, or even building that in to say, you know, maybe not every day, but three times a week, we carve out that five minutes after we do this activity to talk about what it feels like to be in these spaces. And I appreciate those, those prompts that, that you gave. So, you know, one of the words that I know you use, I think it's in the subtitle actually of your book is etiquette. What does that look like for students or for children in digital spaces? What does it mean for them to have, you know, etiquette beyond sitting a certain way or interacting a certain way at the dinner table? You know, like where we might think about etiquette, what does that look like in a digital space or, or with phones even?

Catherine Pearlman:

So in the digital world, there are no social cues that you can see. You, you know, we kids, especially, they read people's faces, they hear tone. That's how they understand the words that they're getting, but in the digital world, it's just, they're flat. There's none of that. And so they really miss that and they can misconstrue something easily. So in digital etiquette, like even in the classroom, you know, Google classroom and people are sharing docs and they're making comments together at a very young age. And so there's a way to think before you type to say, like, could this be misread? Am I being kind, am I putting my best foot forward? Am I saying something that maybe could be copied? Am I sharing private information? So these are things that kids in the classroom are having to do. Yeah.

Catherine Pearlman:

And so teaching them, okay. You know, maybe an emoji, believe it or not, that actually gives tone. You know, that's some way of saying LOL, like, I'm just kidding. This is a joke. Or thinking before you type something, is this something I'd be proud if it was read on the loud speaker, would my grandma be proud of me for this, you know, things just simple things. And cyber bullying can be extreme, but could also be really subtle. And so that's all, I think, under the heading of etiquette of, of how do we interact with each other using our manners.

Monica Burns:

I absolutely love what you just said about, would I be proud if this was read on the loud speaker because I've and I will sometimes joke about this too, although there's not quite, you know, that much of, you know, it's not so much a funny thing to say, but you know, I'll often say like, you know, you've probably seen those memes too, with the work that you do, you know, treat every email, like you're reading it aloud and a deposition, right? Like you're reading it aloud in court. And I'll sometimes say that just kind of in passing to family or friends when I'm like, oh no, I meant that like, or you, we always have to be careful or all those kind of things. Right. But that is such a great way to help a student understand what is essentially the same concept. Right.

Monica Burns:

Do you stand by this? Is this something that you would want everyone to see if it's not <laugh> right? Like what are you gonna change about these pieces? So I love that concept of just, you know, would you read this aloud over the loud speaker for everyone to hear as that kind of like way for kids to wrap their head around what it means to be kind right and productive in these spaces. And now, you know, you talked a bit there about tone, right? Emojis can communicate tone. I know I've been doing some, you know, work and recommendations around formative assessment, but also, you know, using voice comments and voice feedback to help communicate some of those tones that you're right. Can just hit a little bit flat. So such great pieces there for teachers to consider in their own classroom practice that are, you know, kind of already happening, right.

Monica Burns:

Are part of these routines that might be established, but we can just be so purposeful and intentional about to bring something like etiquette in whether we're using that word when we talk about it, right. With kids or not. So, you know, what is the role of educators here when it comes to setting up kids for success at home, right? There's the classroom piece, but is there, you know, is there a role for them to provide recommendations to families around personal device use? You know, I've been out of the classroom for several years now and it's increasingly normal. I'm like normal with air quotes here, right. For our youngest learners to have a phone right. In their backpack. And I know, you know, 10 years ago I was getting questions about, you know, what should we do here? What is too much screen time, all the things. So, you know, what is the role of educators when it comes to providing recommendations to families around using a personal device?

Catherine Pearlman:

I think parents are begging for assistance. And I actually think schools and teachers are great place to get that. First of all, some schools are having some guidance around, like, what do we do with our phones in the school? So they are not allowed out. Or we have a BA, some teachers have a basket and all phones go in the basket. Even teachers are starting to put their phone down and meet kids outside the classroom to greet them face to face, looking up mm-hmm <affirmative>, you know, otherwise all the kids are looking, you know, in the hallways looking down at their phones. So I think having some established guidelines in school carries over to home, you know, and, and if the school communicates that to the kid, to the parents, then I think that they can say, oh, in school, you're not allowed to have it here.

Catherine Pearlman:

And that works for you. Oh, we can have a basket too. You know, where we're having meals. Maybe we put the phones in the basket. So I think those are some great things. And then, you know, I used to laugh because, you know, parents call me all the time for problems that they're having with their kids. And they'll say like, I can't get my kids to listen. I can't get my to do to do anything. And, you know, I, I see them carrying the kids backpack from the, you know, school to the car or emptying the lunch box or doing all these things that at school, the, the, the kids are doing, you know, in kindergarten, the teacher isn't taking 32 lunch boxes and like, ding them out. She's the kids put 'em on their, on their hook. And then they go to get them.

Catherine Pearlman:

They're responsible for their things. Mm-Hmm <affirmative>, and they're absolutely capable if we give them these guidelines. And so, you know, parents are like, my kid is terrible at home, but amazing at school. Okay. Why is that? There's so much structure at school. Let's put some of that structure in, at home mm-hmm <affirmative> and I think teachers can be great about helping parents think about some structure and identify the kids that actually are really struggling with disconnecting from their digital devices and to talk to them more as a collaboration about like, okay, how is the kid using the device at home? When, what, what could we work together? So we're on the same page. The kid is getting the same mesh message across the board. So I think even though, you know, parents' homes are very different than school. I think there's a great collaboration that can happen between teachers and parents.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. It's such, you know, just, you know, the prompts that you might use in a classroom, right. What is the language that we say, and then we keep repeating throughout the day, right? What is the norm when we're interacting during different parts of the day, right. Even,

you know, as you mentioned earlier, you know, what does it look like when we come down off of a device, right? Or we put that away, or we transition and, you know, it's easier said than done the families, putting the phone away, right. Are everyone putting their device in a basket at a certain part of day? But I think, you know, that's a big piece of that modeling that takes place in a classroom, you know, as well. So I just, I love that idea of transferring some of the conversations and the language and just the routines, if they're working in a classroom, right. They may work in this other environment if it's, if you keep it going. So, you know, you have a new book and you do a lot of work around the space and I wanna make sure people know about it and they know where to connect with you and learn more about your work. So can you share us a little bit about what you've been working on your new publication and, and where people can connect with you?

Catherine Pearlman:

Sure. so the book is called *First Phone: A Child's Guide to Digital Responsibility, Safety, and Etiquette* purposely titled *First Phone*. So parents can Google and then it will come up. Because parents are constantly Googling, like what should I do when my kid gets their first phone? And parents can find me and teachers at www.thefamilycoach.com and @TheFamilyCoach on Twitter and Facebook. And I love to hear stories about, you know, what are some of the challenges? I, I, I like to write a lot, I speak a lot. So I love feedback when, when parents or teachers use the book or have a challenge that they they're looking for help on. I love to hear from people. So please contact me.

Monica Burns:

Wonderful. I will make sure that everyone knows where to find all the things to get connected with you, to find your new book right here on the show notes on the page for today's episode. So thank you so much for your time today and for sharing all of these great gems, these great nuggets with listeners.

Catherine Pearlman:

Thank you for having me. It was a great chat.

Dr. Pearlman shared so many actionable tips and ideas today.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Assess kid's ability to disconnect. Establish guidelines for personal device use. Start conversations on tech-etiquette early. Give kids strategies for shutting down.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Dr. Catherine Pearlman on classtechtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #177!

Promotion/Reminder

A big thank you to Tract, our sponsor for this episode. Don't forget to visit teach.tract.app and use access code MONICA at sign up to access Tract's on-demand, projects FREE for your classroom. That's teach.tract.app and access code MONICA.

Outro

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Episode Resources

- Check out Dr. Catherine Pearlman's [website](#) and books: [First Phone](#) and [Ignore It!](#)
- Follow Dr. Catherine Pearlman on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)
- [How to Help Students Better Navigate Digital Spaces \[EdTech Essentials Spotlight\]](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Be Internet Awesome - Digital Safety by Google](#)
- [How to Use Emojis with Students](#) (Blog Post)
- [Creation Activities that Teach Digital Citizenship](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Help Students Be Respectful in Online Spaces with Hedreich Nichols](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Digital Citizenship Lesson Ideas for Students](#) (Blog Post)
- [How to Use Tech Tools to Avoid Distractions for Students](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [13 Ways to Use Emojis That Might Surprise You](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Support Healthy Media Use in Your Classroom with Lila Shroff](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Social Emotional Learning in the Digital World with Krista Leh](#) (Podcast Episode)

- [What Does Digital Citizenship Really Mean With Dr. Kristen Mattson](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Keep Students Safe and Secure Online](#) (Blog Post)
- [The Importance of Supporting Students with Mobile Devices](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Lead Conversations About Media Use with Students](#) (Blog Post)
- [Using Technology to Scaffold Social-Emotional Learning Skills](#) (Blog Post)